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VINDICATION

OF THE

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BAPTISTS,

FROM THE

CRIMINALITY OF A CHARGE

EXHIBITED AGAINST THEM,

By the Rev. Mr. WESLEY.

BY WILLIAM KINGSFORD.

*"To the Law, and to the Testimony" of Jesus Christ and
his Apostles.*

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VINDICATION

OF THE

BAPTISTS, &c.

THE Rev. Mr. WESLEY, in a Sermon, preached at Sevenoaks, the 28th of October 1788, was pleased to represent a body of people, by him called Anabaptists, as being exceedingly criminal. The charge he exhibited against us was to the following purport:

When a Sinner is just awakened to see his state as a Sinner, the people called Anabaptists, begin to trouble him about outward forms and modes of Worship, and that of Baptism; but they had better cut his throat, for it is sending of him to Hell and perdition."

The Minister who wrote this, adds, "I believe the above is as near the words Mr. Wesley mentioned in the pulpit at Sevenoaks, as can well be; and as I was a hearer at the time, I readily subscribe my testimony to the truth of it." Signed by himself and four other persons,

From a paragraph in a second Letter, written by another Minister, it appears, that the first does not exaggerate what Mr. Wesley then said, for this, speaking of the above, says, "It nearly includes the ideas and expressions of Mr. Wesley;" and "his language was equally pointed." Signed by the writer and three other persons who heard the Sermon.

The Letters referred to, are in my hands, any of Mr. Wesley's Ministers may see them if they call upon me; for, instead of being desired to keep them private, I had authority to publish the names of several of the subscribers. I thought proper.

And, I am credibly informed, that this is not the first time Mr. Wesley has represented our conduct in a similar light; but as such declarations may tend to make us, and our sentiments appear barbarous and erroneous in the eyes of many, I am desir'd to attempt a vindication of myself and brethren from the supposed criminality of our conduct.

To many Christians, Mr. Wesley's charge against us, and the Pope's bulls thundered out against the Protestants, will appear equally contemptible; but it is not so with all. Mr. Wesley's words have great weight with his own people: and such speeches may tend to increase the spirit of bigotry and persecution amongst them, if they are suffered to pass unnoticed; for, I desire to appeal to every unprejudiced reader, if there does not appear a considerable degree of both, in Mr. Wesley's charge against us. Twenty years ago Mr. Wesley's people complained much of the persecuting spirit of the world; but now that spirit abates, and a liberal one greatly prevails. Let the Methodists be upon their guard, lest the spirit they have so often complained of, should influence them. They can now talk of their tens of thousands; and numbers often give confidence to men, and generally lead them to despise a few; but numbers do not prove that truth is with them, if it did, the Roman Catholics, who can talk of their tens of millions, would have the best proof. Error has generally spread fastest; the mind of man being prone to follow its own inventions; and it is error and weakness if Christians, because they are numerous, despise, or look down with contempt, on a smaller number who differ from them.

I am happy to find Mr. Wesley's charge appears equally as applicable to the conduct of our adorable Saviour, and his Apostles, as it does to us; for the scripture informs us, it was God who sent John to baptize, John i. 33. That Jesus himself was baptized in Jordan, Matt. iii. 13 to 17, and afterwards tarried with his disciples, "and baptized." John iii. 22. That he "made and baptized more disciples than John, though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples." John iv. 1, 2. From these passages it appears, that

that God, and his Christ, thought it necessary that men should give an outward and public testimony by baptism, that they were determined, by the grace of God, to give up themselves to the Lord Jesus as his disciples and faithful followers; as for the reasons why it pleased the Lord to institute this ordinance, the grace conveyed in it, and spiritual signification of it, I have nothing to do with it in this little piece; it is sufficient for me to shew that infinite wisdom appointed it, and therefore we ought never to despise and alter it, lest we should thereby impeach the wisdom of God by substituting inventions of our own in its stead. If the Lord had seen best, he could have appointed something more easy and pleasing to flesh and blood as well as man; but as he did not, we ought to acquiesce and obey. When Jesus was on earth, the loaves and the fishes, curiosity, and other motives, procured him many occasional followers; but there were but few who would venture to devote themselves to him, because he required them not only to forsake sin, but also to give a public and outward testimony to their fellow-creatures that they were his disciples by being baptized in his name; this, no doubt, was a terrible cross, because it subjected them to the derision of their neighbours, the contempt of the world, and made them obnoxious to those "Pharisees and lawyers (who) rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized of him." Luke xii. 30. and consequently kept off all those who were only for religion in her silver slippers; but Jesus "said unto them all, if any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me: For whoever shall be ashamed of me, and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Fathers, and of the holy angels" Luke ix. 23, 26.

I believe Mr. Wesley's good sense will tell him, that if he had followed the example of Jesus in this particular, or required that those who joined his societies should first be dipped in cold water before the face of their fellow creatures, instead of speaking a few words in private, and opening their
hands

hands to receive a ticket, that many of those who are now called Methodists would have excused themselves with "I cannot come;" and therefore, we need not wonder, that he should talk so much against it.

Jesus, after his resurrection, commanded his disciples to go, and "teach all nations." And what was they to teach them, if it was not the first rudiments of christianity? After that they were to baptize "them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And after this they are commanded to teach them more, viz, "To observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. From hence it plainly appears, that Jesus knew it was better for them to *baptize the awakened sinners* than to *cut their throats*.

In obedience to the commands of Jesus, we find the disciples began to preach to the Jews, that "God had made that same Jesus whom *they had crucified* both Lord and Christ." And when some of them were awakened, and "pricked in their heart," and said to Peter, "What shall we do?" Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you." Acts ii. 37, 38. Now, from hence we may observe, that Peter was one of those who *troubled awakened sinners about baptism*; but, according to Mr. Wesley's account, he had *better have cut their throats, for it was sending them to Hell and perdition*.

At Samaria, many were awakened by Philip, and soon afterwards, "They were baptized, both men and women." Acts viii. 12. Poor Philip! How sorry he would have been if he had afterwards known, that, instead of *troubling* these men and women *about baptism*, he had *better have cut their throats*; but he was ignorant of such a doctrine, and therefore went on doing his duty; for afterwards he preached Jesus to the Eunuch; and when he believed "They went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch, and he baptized him; and when they were come up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip that the Eunuch saw him no more;

more; and he went on his way rejoicing." Acts viii. 34 to 40. If baptism had not been necessary, I think it likely that the spirit of the Lord would have caught away Philip before; and if the Eunuch had experienced or perceived that Philip, instead of *troubling him about baptism*, had *better have cut his throat*, I believe he would have gone on his way *crying* instead of rejoicing.

But possibly the Eunuch's experience might differ from Mr. Wesley's? True; The Eunuch desired to be baptized—When questioned about his faith, he answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He knew what Philip was about when he baptized him; and when he was come up out of the water, he found by happy experience, that he had reason to go on his way rejoicing; and, I think, he remembered his being baptized as long as he lived.

But, I suppose the infant Wesley, did not desire to be baptized. When questioned about his faith, he could not tell whether he believed in Moses, Christ, or Mahomet. He did not know what the Priest was about when he sprinkled him; he had not sufficient reason to rejoice, nor to know the way he was to go—that he never remembered his being sprinkled as long as he has lived, and that he was ignorant, Baptism was "Not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God." 1 Peter, iii. 21. His conscience knew nothing of the matter. Alas! What a difference in christian experience!

He was *troubled about baptism* before he was about sin; questioned about his faith before Christ was preached to him; said to be regenerate before he could be sensible that he was carnal; to promise, by others, before he consented to it, or gave them a commission to do it; to be a christian without faith, charity, hope, or the knowledge of the truth; and, to crown all, the priest prayed that he might "Lead the rest of his life according to this beginning," which was, without faith, charity, hope, or the knowledge of the truth. How far this prayer has been fulfilled, and what effect the sign of the cross has had upon him, I shall leave him to declare,

clare, if he pleases, from his own experience, because I think I had better not *trouble him* to so much *about his being baptized*, lest he should say, *I had better cut his throat, &c.*

But, after all, it is possible, Mr. Wesley may say, he has the advantage of the Eunuch; for, if he now believes he was baptized in his infancy, it naturally follows, that he also believes that solemn declaration the priest then made, viz. "That this child is regenerate," or born again; and I take it for granted, that Mr. Wesley will allow, that he has been born again since he attained the years of maturity. If so, it follows, that he has been born again and again; and, therefore, has the advantage of the Eunuch and the first christians, who were born again but once.

But some may think, the oftener a man is born again the more fathers he has, the more he is heir to, and, consequently, the more blessings he may expect. I suppose Mr. Wesley can give this, or a better reason for it; or else, it appears very strange for him to *trouble those about another new birth* who were born again when they were christened.

When Paul was awakened, God was pleased to send his servant Ananias to tell him what he "Must do." Acts ix. 6 to 18. and one thing Ananias told him to do, was, to be baptized, for he said to him, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts xxii. 16. Here, we may just observe, that the scripture informs us, it was God who sent Ananias to Paul, *to trouble him* (as Mr. Wesley expresses himself) *about baptism*; but a person, who has only heard Mr. Wesley's representation of such a conduct, might be induced to think that Ananias, instead of saying any thing to him *about it*, had better have *cut his throat, for it was sending him to Hell and perdition.*

But Paul, instead of thinking that Ananias had better have *cut his throat than trouble him about baptism*, followed his practice: for, when he found at Ephesus, certain disciples who had been baptized "unto John's baptism," Paul said unto them, "John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance,

fance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus; and when they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them; the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied." Acts xix. 1 to 6. How clear is it from this, that the Holy Ghost approbated the conduct of Paul and his converts, and crowned their obedience to the institution of Christ by its extraordinary gifts.

And when the Jailor was alarmed by a terrible earthquake, and drew out his sword to kill himself, Paul and Silas, instead of permitting him to cut his throat with it, and thereby sending himself to *Hell and perdition*, said to him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house; and they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house; and he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Acts xvi. 25 to 33. From hence we may learn, that a part of the word of the Lord, which they spake unto him and to all that were in his house, was, that they should be baptized; and, that to baptize an *awakened sinner* is much *better* than permitting of him to cut his throat, and rush into *Hell and perdition*.

When Cornelius and his friends were converted to christianity, and had also received the Holy Ghost, we find, Peter said, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we." Acts x. 47. Happily, as Mr. Wesley was not there, it was not forbidden; and then Peter "Commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Acts x. 48. Now, if there had been any thing in Peter's command contrary to the will of God; or, if what Mr. Wesley now asserts had then been true, I think these people, who were influenced by the Holy Ghost, must have known it, and might, to evade the trouble of it, have argued with him thus: We are baptized with the Spirit; we have the essence of baptism

within us, and, therefore, need not the application of water; God does not regard the quantity of water, nay; all the water in the universe cannot make us better, nor more acceptable to him; but, instead of any thing of this kind, we find a contrary argument is raised from it, and the question is, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have (or seeing they have) received the Holy Ghost?" Which proved they were fit subjects for it; and we do not find there was any so weak as to forbid it.

We read in the bible of a great man who desired to be cured of a leprosy, but when the prophet commanded him to wash in Jordan, that he might be clean—he was very angry. I suppose he had no dislike to the Prophet's striking his hand over the place, nor to his sprinkling a few drops of water on his face; but to send him to dip himself seven times in the river Jordan, was despicable, and *troubling* him too much; "So he turned and went away in a rage." 2 Kings, v. 11, 12. We also read in the New Testament of many of Naaman's stamp who rejected baptism; but not an instance can be found therein of any which had received the Holy Ghost, who thought it might be altered or dispensed with; or, who taught others to think lightly of, or despise it. And the case before us is a sufficient proof that water baptism is necessary, and not to be neglected, even by those who are baptized with the spirit; for, though these people were baptized with the Holy Ghost in an extraordinary manner, so as to speak in several different languages, and magnify God, yet neither Peter nor the Holy Spirit thought that was sufficient to justify them in setting aside the command and ordinance of God and Christ; or that it was not obligatory upon the converts to follow the example of Jesus, and to "Fulfil all righteousness." Matt. iii. 15. but, on the contrary, insisted upon their being "Buried with Christ in baptism. Col. ii. 12. Rom. vi. 4. And such transactions are undeniable proofs that believers baptism is an appointment not to be dispensed with; that the conduct of those zealous Baptists, Peter, Philip, and Paul, and their present followers,

followers, in *troubling awakened sinners about baptism*, is most certainly right and justifiable, and agreeable to the will and pleasure of their master; and, consequently, that what Mr. Wesley has advanced against it, is most certainly wrong, and agreeable only to the will and appointment of man; and whether we are to obey man rather than God, judge ye?

Several more instances might be produced from scripture, but I think these are sufficient to convince every unprejudiced reader that Jesus Christ and his Apostles generally commanded and directed converts and awakened sinners to be baptized, or, (as Mr. Wesley has it) *troubled them about Baptism*; and, I think, every christian will allow, that there was no criminality in Jesus, or his Apostles, for so doing; and, consequently, there can be none in us for doing as he did; especially, when we consider, that we are commanded or required to imitate the blessed Jesus, and be followers of him and his Apostles. I therefore hope, that I have vindicated myself and brethren from the criminality of the charge brought against us, and proved, that we have sufficient authority from the Scripture to persuade believers to be "Buried with Christ, by Baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so (they) also should walk in newness of life." Rom. vi. 4.

Let me now assure you, that I firmly believe our general conduct is, to endeavour to persuade awakened sinners to look to Christ as their prophet, to teach; their Priest to atone and intercede for them: and, when we think they are blessed with that "Faith, which worketh by love," then we endeavour to persuade them to exercise it, and to own, and honour the blessed Jesus as their King and Lawgiver; by being baptized as he was, and following him whithersoever he goeth, even to observe "All things whatsoever he has commanded." Sincere obedience being the surest proof of faith and love.

I desire also, to return my thanks to the Rev. Mr. Wesley for the honour he has done us, in bearing a public

testimony, that there is still a people who are zealous to maintain, in its primitive purity, that holy, but most despised and neglected ordinance of the blessed Jesus, Believers Baptism; who regard his command and example more than they do the command and example of men. A people who are not afraid nor ashamed to be publicly baptized into his name, notwithstanding the scoffs and derisions, contempt, and persecutions they often meet with.

And let me also assure him, that we do not suppose we merit any thing by being baptized; we do not trust in, or make a Saviour of Baptism, nor would we lead others to do it; no, we do it, and we desire others to do it, because it is the will of God and his Christ, who have put it into our hearts to love them; which love constrains us to keep their commandments. "If a man love me he will keep my words," John xiv. 23.

Should Mr. Wesley's people read this Defence, it is possible some of them may say, before they get through it, you are warm—you use rough weapons, and fight with a bad spirit; but give me leave to say, it is not so; but if a stronger man, when he attacks a weaker, should drop such of his weapons as the weaker can take up and use to defend himself, then the laws of God and man justify him in so doing. This is my case; I pick up the very weapons Mr. Wesley dropped at Sevenoaks, and turn them upon himself. 'Tis true, I take also the two-edged sword of the spirit, (the word of God) which I allow to be a much keener weapon than Mr. Wesley used against us; but this is lawful, and my desire was, that I might use it discreetly, and sure I am, that it was not in anger.

I respect Mr. Wesley much, and I am sensible that he has been instrumental of great good, and I hope he will of more. My prayer is, that these passages of the word may be blessed by the great author of it, so as to separate error from truth in his breast, and that pure truth alone may dwell in him before he dies. But though I hope he is a good and useful man, yet I cannot think him greater and better

better than our glorious Immanuel, nor a wiser Lawgiver; and, therefore, when he cries up the inventions of man, and disclaims against the plain institutions of Christ, I cannot help thinking it (undesignedly) derogatory to the wisdom of a dear Saviour, an insult to his honour, dignity, and kingly office, and an affront to his supreme authority, as the sole and only lawgiver of his people, who has the greatest right to command our most faithful obedience in that way which he has been pleased to appoint, and "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but whosoever shall do, and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven." Matt. v. 19.

A collection of **HYMNS** on Believers Baptism, by Mr. JOHN FELLOWS, being in general use amongst the Baptists in these parts, may give those Enquirers who chuse to read them, much information respecting our general views of Baptism. I shall add three of them to this piece. The first being often sung before a person is baptized; the second is sometimes sung by the persons to be baptized, and the last after the ordinance is administered.

H Y M N XXV.

THE INVITATION. John vii. 37.

PECULIAR MEASURE.

HUMBLE souls who seek salvation

Thro' the Lord's redeeming blood;

Hear the voice of Revelation,

Tread the path that Jesus trod.

Flee

Flee to him, your only Saviour,
 In his mighty name confide;
 In the whole of your behaviour
 Own him as your sov'reign guide.

Hear the blest'd Redeemer call you,
 Listen to his heav'nly voice.

Dread no ills that can befall you
 While you make his ways your choice.

Jesus says, " Let each believer
 Be Baptized in my name :"
 Thus himself in Jordan's river
 Was immers'd beneath the stream.

Plainly here his footsteps tracing;
 Follow him without delay;
 Gladly his command embracing,
 Lo! your Captain leads the way.

View the rite with understanding;
 Jesus grave before you lies:
 Be interr'd at his commanding;
 In your Saviour's likeness rise.

H Y M N XXVIII.

*The Believer constrained by the love of Christ to follow him,
 in his Ordinances. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.*

COMMON METRE.

DEAR Lord, and will thy pard'ning love
 Embrace a wretch so vile?
 Wilt thou my load of guilt remove
 And bless me with thy smile?
 Hast thou discharg'd my dreadful debt,
 And set the pris'ner free?
 Can'st thou each bold affront forget,
 And save a wretch like me?

And

And shall my proud rebellious heart;
 Yet murmur at thy will?
 Shall I from thy commands depart,
 And wander from thee still?

Haſt thou for me the croſs endur'd,
 And all the ſhamé deſpis'd?
 And ſhall I be aſham'd, O Lord,
 With thee to be baptiz'd?

Didſt thou the great example lead
 In Jordan's ſwelling flood?
 And ſhall my pride diſdain a deed
 That's worthy of my God?

Dear Lord, thy condeſcending love
 Reproves my cold delays:
 My wand'ring ſteps how ſlow they move,
 How careleſs in thy way's!

And ſhall I ſtill rebellious ſtand?
 Let fear and ſhame be gone!
 This ordinance is thy command;
 Thy will, my God, be done;

H Y M N XLVIII.

The Duties of Baptized Chriſtians. Col. iii. 12.

SHORT METRE.

ALL you that in the flood
 Have own'd your holy Lord;
 And to his people join'd yourſelves
 According to his word.

In Zion you muſt dwell,
 Her altar ne'er forſake;
 Muſt come to all her ſolemn feaſts,
 And all her joys partake.

She

She must employ your thoughts;
 And your unceasing care :
 Her welfare be your constant wish,
 And her increase your prayer.

With humbleness of mind,
 Amongst her sons rejoice :
 A meek and quiet spirit is
 With God of highest price.

Never offend or grieve
 Your brethren in the way ;
 But shun the dark abodes of strife,
 Like children of the day.

Highly in love esteem
 Your Pastors in the Lord ;
 They break the bread of life to you,
 And labour in the word.

A constant watch maintain
 Against your ev'ry foe :
 With fervent pray'r beseech your God
 To bless the way you go.

Grow ye in ev'ry grace,
 In ev'ry gift improve ;
 Grow in the knowledge of the Lord,
 In purity and love.

FINIS.

